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New Global Art Connection: Paying Tribute to the Wave-Makers (1910-2010)

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Abstract

This paper highlights *Wave-Makers (1910–2010)*, a collaborative timeline redesign project, which involves interactive and advanced web-based technology to connect and complement arts curricula at two higher education institutions, one located in China and another in the United States. Through in-depth research, video-conferencing, artistic interpretations, and exhibits at both locations, students from the two universities gained appreciation and respect for 20 individuals who made a difference in their respective cultures and helped shape contemporary art worlds. Juxtaposing visuals with students' personal observations through digital photcollage, this paper shows how and why the wave-makers became inspirational models: *Unforgettable Life Stories and Superb Dedication*—Pan Yuliang and Margaret Bourke-White; *Visionary Commitment and Exquisite Sensitivities*—Alvin Ailey and Guan Pinghu; *Admirable Integrity and Solid Convictions*—Xu Shichang and Norman Rockwell; and *Revolutionary Foresight and Groundbreaking Endeavors*—Jackson Pollock and Zhang Daqian. Instructional guidelines for implementing this global art project are also discussed.

**New Global Art Connection:
Paying Tribute to the Wave-Makers (1910–2010)**

History typically focuses attention on individuals and cultural groups who have seized center stage politically. Strategies used by the dominant power to negate the periphery may include controlling the dissemination of historical information in formal and public history curriculum and policing interpretations of the classic literature (Wertsch & Polman, 2001). An urgent and concrete need exists in intercultural communication to redirect attention to variations in local cultures instead of perpetuating nationalism and an overarching ideal of each country (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010).



Figure 1. Wave-Makers Poster

The first section of this paper recaps the components of a global art education project, featuring a number of Chinese and American artistic revolutionaries (1910–2010), dubbed

wave-makers. In this project, which took place in spring 2010,¹ interactive and advanced web-based technology was used to connect and complement arts curricula at two higher education institutions, one located in China and the other in the United States. Through in-depth research, video-conferencing, artistic interpretations, and exhibition, students from both universities gained appreciation and respect for a pool of individuals in their respective cultures who contributed to and made a difference in what came to be their contemporary art worlds, the respective institutions for art (Danto, 1981). The following section describes the exhibition and students' reasons for selecting their wave-makers as well as five themes associated with these inspirational models. To conclude, the final section offers reflective comments regarding the planning and organization of this global educational project.

Why Honor Art Revolutionaries?

The last century prior to the new millennium witnessed a surge of global immigration, impacting international education policy, practice, and research, and hence conveys an urgency to cultivate global citizenship in this new era (Lewin, 2011). Predicted a decade ago (Kellogg, 2002), massive shifts in populations across international borders resulted from (a) the weakening of nation states and the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations; (b) an alarming surge of world trade, human resources, and capital flow; and (c) the aggregate forces of democratization and privatization across the globe. In response to such chaos and radical changes everywhere, art educators all over the world relied once again on the power of art to forge greater connections globally (Delacruz, Arnold, Kuo, & Parson, 2009).

This global education pilot project² was inspired by a personal ambition to problematize change, continuity, transition, and historical trajectories in order to project novel ways of discussing the contributions of as many 20th-century cultural wave-makers as possible and to pose the following research question: How can the concept of revolution provide the contextual and conceptual background to frame and discuss the contributions of individuals who had made significant differences in the arts disciplines?

¹ The year 2010 marked the centennial anniversaries of both my university and the culmination of the struggle to overthrow the imperial rule of dynasties in China—the triumph of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911.

² This project is to be continued in spring 2013 as it was recently awarded a research scholarship from the Baker–Nord Center for the Humanities sponsored by Case Western Reserve University.

Revolution is a comparatively new entry in the lexicon of the Han Chinese with little precedence and few references in canonical literature before the 20th century. The first of two characters constituting the word *revolution* in Han, *ge* means to slaughter; and the second character *ming* denotes life. The word choice was meant to be charged with a combative undertone when translated from Japanese by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in an era prior to the greatest social political upheavals in the country's national history. The remarkable Xinhai Revolution in 1911 marked the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, and a 4,000-year-old monarchy suddenly transformed into the first republican state in Asia. The 20th century was a period of dynamic change in Chinese history. Another ideological revolution, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 significantly shook the fundamental outlook of Chinese intellectuals (Chan & Xia, 2009), who by then had fully embraced the spirit of change; however, the notorious cultural revolution (1968–1977), which began as political turmoil, ushered in a dark period of Chinese society, when numerous outstanding cultural workers and artists were tormented and perished, their works destroyed and forever gone.

The contributions of art revolutionaries, in this project called wave-makers, have been invaluable. They were the predecessors in the making of contemporary art history, contributing to the formation of today's *artworld* (Danto, 1981) and the emergence of 21st-century Chinese art (Lu, 2010; Saatchi, 2008; Vine, 2008). Although the modern was at one time equated with the avant-garde, following the inception of theorizing by Burger (1974/1984), the definition of avant-garde was obscured and its status as a particular movement in the art history during the 1910s and 1920s was contested (Murphy, 1998). At times,

Avant-gardism [was] synonymous with the most adventurous manifestations of modern art, ranging from the distorted but still decipherable images of Cubism . . . to entirely abstract shapes . . . , from a mustachioed 'Mona Lisa' . . . to a pickled shark. . . (Wood, 1999, p. 7)

However, other sources strongly rejected its geographical confinement to Europe in the early 20th century and included Abstract Expressionism, the New York School and what occurred in the changing art world after 1945 as a continuation of its pluralistic spirit (Sandler, 2006). Since its definition was illuminated in such bright positive light, international art communities (Giannachi, 2002; Mena Chicuri, 2007; Peppis, 2000; Rowell, 2002) competed to attach the term to their local art movements. An intimate connection with the avant-garde sparked progress and forward thinking, analogous to crossing boundaries or pushing perimeters into new territory (Murphy, 1998; Sandler, 2006; Wood, 1999).

Interdisciplinary (architecture, dance, literature, photography, theatre, film) dialogue across international borders was highly sought by members of several well-known avant-garde art

movements, such as Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, and Pop Art (Scheunemann, 2005). These avant-garde artists were very idealistic, dedicated to helping people gain new points of view through their art and performances. Furthermore, they hoped their work could also offer a few strategies of being (Fineberg, 1995) to counter those used by all supreme political power structures to negate the periphery through control of the mass media and to restrict interpretations and discourse.

“Wave-Makers” was the theme of this global art education project, which aimed to experiment with the integration of advanced web technology to forge tighter connections between art education programs in two institutions across national borders. In addition, I speculate that advanced media will one day become a powerful means of disseminating historical information and even replace formal history curriculum. I offer as evidence the popularity of TV serials that currently provide alternative interpretations of what is available in formative education in many Asian countries. An eventual goal of mine is, in fact, to formulate a conceptual framework to buttress a proposal for a series of multimedia productions that can be used as teaching supplements intended to reach young parents in the Chinese Diaspora, who will not hesitate to invest in the edutainment of their offspring.

Who Are the Wave-Makers?

Participants from both locations separately reflected on their own education and conducted several group brainstorming sessions to compile a list of extraordinary artists who worked during the past 100 years. Rigorous research was conducted on *how* these wave-makers made a difference in the arts disciplines from 1910 to 2010. The wave-maker could have engaged in any of the arts disciplines, for instance, the visual arts, music, dance, theater, film, photography, design (graphic, fashion, environment), or architecture. Even genres outside the fine arts, such as folk art, avant-garde, applied, and functional art, were considered.

Student participants focused on the contributions of these wave-makers, for example, creating revolutionary changes in style, form, training, and educational methods. Some research emphasized their innovative use of materials and tools; others dwelled on how they brought about paradigm shifts in the content of the arts or produced a reconceptualization of the particular discipline and its pedagogy. A few traced the wave-makers’ contributions to the elevation of interdisciplinary engagement and development. Student participants then analyzed how historical, cultural, social, and political factors significantly influenced the recognition, achievements, or acknowledgment of these wave-makers.

A final synthesis of the way the issues of time, place, and context impacted the wave-makers’ contributions in a century redirected their inquiry back to their personal learning. Student participants from both universities created visual interpretations of the selected wave-maker’s

profile and contributions. To fully exploit the communicative power of numerous personal and cultural symbols used in each visual work, participants composed an artist statement to explain their intention and methodology by answering the following questions.

1. To what degree does this work exhibit creative or original thinking and process? Describe.
2. Is the idea I wanted to show easy to see or understand, and am I satisfied with this work? Explain.
3. How does this work reflect my environment and my culture, and where is the evidence reflected in this work? Expand.

Research findings were displayed adjacent to each visual interpretation and artist statement at an exhibition to inform and educate the public about the contributions of the wave-maker. Printouts of students' PowerPoint slides provided a contextual introduction to each wave-maker and her or his work. This format also improved time management during setup and helped maintain a certain level of cohesiveness in presentation. A well-organized exhibition has the potential to rectify history by bringing forward substantial information directly to the public, thus enhancing civic engagement and promoting cultural dialogue (Zhao & Wu, 2010). Juxtaposing visuals with research and stories in eight digital photocollages, the next section is a montage incorporating five themes as reasons to discuss the contributions of 10 wave-makers.

How Did They Make Waves?

Unforgettable Life Stories and Superb Dedication

Life has always been difficult for women in the professional world outside the domestic arena. The 20th-century art world with all its gatekeepers in various realms and at diverse levels was no exception, so much so that Nochlin (1988) concluded that few great women artists have emerged in history because of overwhelming institutional constraints and contextual inhibitions that prohibited the equal participation of females in this discipline. Regardless, courageous women fought against all odds to make their artistic expression visible and their statements heard.

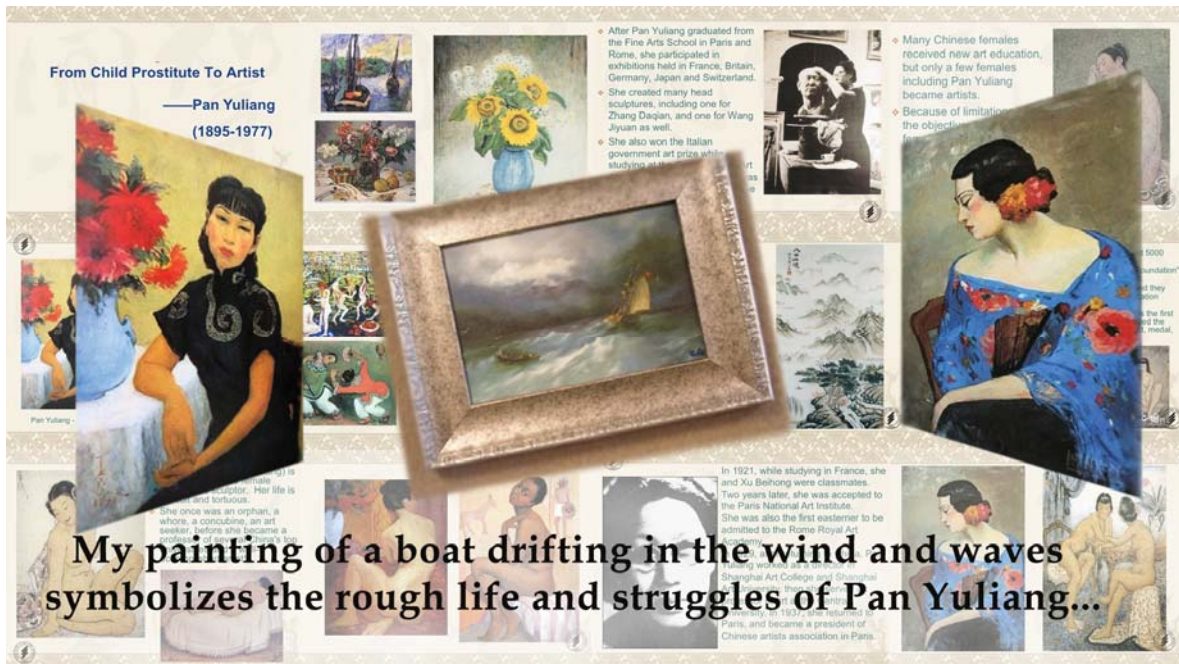


Figure 2. A Portrait of Pan Yuliang by Wang Xue and Tan Mengmeng

An orphan sold to a brothel as a child, Pan Yuliang (1895–1977) became the first female artist from Asia to be admitted to the Rome National Art Academy in Italy in 1925. After undergoing a decade of rigorous academia-style training in Europe, she specialized in oil painting. Although she was invited to teach art in Shanghai for a few years, she exiled herself to France because of tremendous pressure resulting from rumors surrounding her early life.

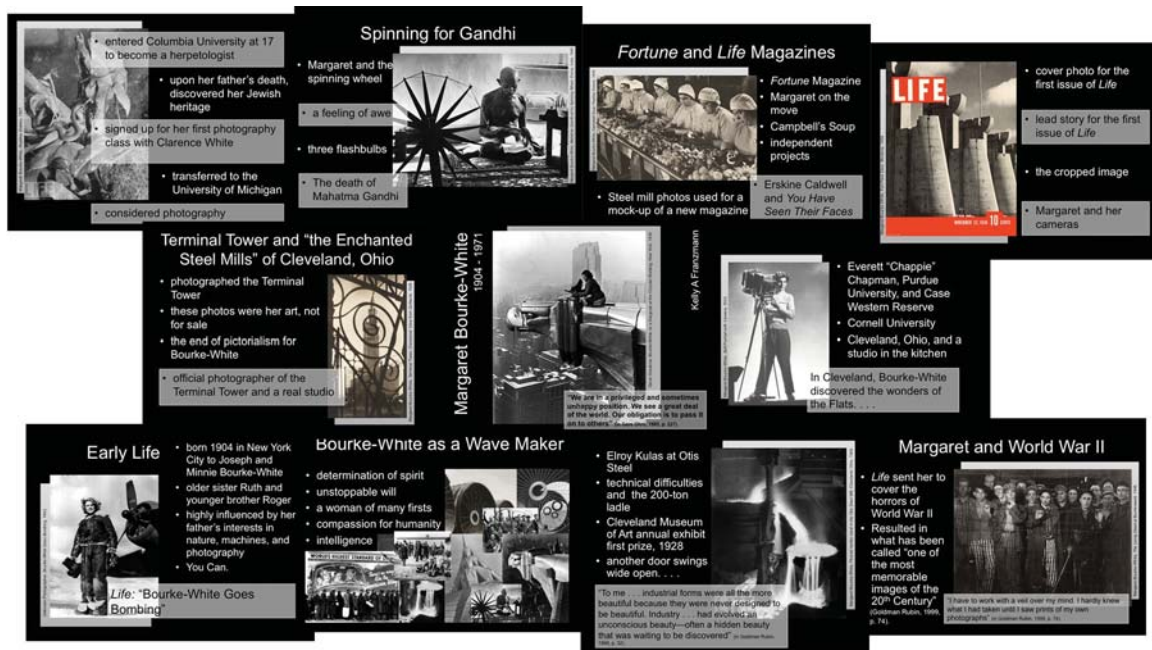


Figure 3. A Portrait of Margaret Bourke-White by Kelly

Strongly encouraged by her father, photographer Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971) pushed numerous boundaries with her work, covering factory workers in the South during the 1930s and the harsh reality of Jewish concentration camps during World War II for *Life* magazine. Her ambition was to strive to create a remarkable presence in photojournalism, a profession dominated by males because of the danger and hardship in the field.

Familiarity with her hometown fostered a special bond for many of my students, one of whom stated:

I had never heard of Bourke-White, and the fact that she was so heavily connected to Cleveland and such huge events in history was impressive. It is always such a nice feeling to hear that famous artists who have had such an influence on a national level came from areas that I am familiar with. The close-to-home aspect is humbling and encouraging to a future artist and art teacher.

Visionary Commitment and Exquisite Sensitivities

The development of all disciplines, especially the arts, mandates a large enough pool of individuals who have cultivated the refined sensibilities, skills, and knowledge necessary to steer practitioners of those disciplines in the direction of a collective transformed vision. Thus, the wavemakers who contributed their time and energy in the training and education of junior members and the grooming and guidance of successors are admirable.



Figure 4. A Portrait of Alvin Ailey by Kara

Alvin Ailey (1931–1989), the African American choreographer who incorporated multicultural elements in his work was preceded by numerous wave-makers who were part of an earlier tradition of making waves. He was particularly insightful in his use of dancers of color, collaborating to present a visual contrast onstage to achieve a new sense of harmony. No doubt he was standing on the shoulders of great forerunners, including Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, who sought to unify and embrace the spirit of several traditions and to repair separations. Ailey's personal vision for the discipline proved long-lasting as his dance troupe continues to perform his will and vision today.



Figure 5. A Portrait of Guan Pinghu by Chen Yubin and Zhang Zhe

The master of an ancient Chinese musical instrument, the *Guqin*, Guan Pinghu's (1897–1967) performance was so exquisite that his version of *Liu Shui* (*Flowing Water*) was launched by NASA into space with the Voyager spacecraft in 1977 on the *Voyager Golden Record*. His greatest contribution to Chinese music history, however, was his overhaul of theory and his composition of numerous exercise pieces of progressive degrees of difficulty to allow students of this classical instrument to practice their finger work. Equivalent to Chopin's *Études*, Guan's work provided smooth transitional stages from the acquisition of basic technique to onstage performance. His popular musical scores improved the level of music appreciation among members of the general public beyond a small handful of aristocratic music lovers.

Solid Convictions and Admirable Integrity

Power has the potential to corrupt the mind and soul, but mindfulness of how great power is accompanied by great responsibilities is a good check. Many of the wavemakers had the courage to surpass designated roles and explore arenas outside their own disciplines. Some created impact in the sociopolitical realm of civilizations at a time when participatory acts were unscripted for the artist's role they had to play.

An atypical multitalented character, Xu Shichang (1855–1939) was a painter, a calligrapher, and a poet, who also happened to be the President of the Republic of China (Beijing government) from 1918 to 1922. In the decade directly after the overthrow of the Qing dynasty when the country was still in the midst of unrest and turmoil, he stepped forward and fulfilled his sociopolitical role and mission. Upon retiring from office, he revised several literary and aesthetic theories and left a legacy in publications. As President, his greatest contribution to the arts, however, was a policy of “intellectual revitalization,” which permitted a more liberal atmosphere that indirectly supported the cultural involvement of Chinese youth during and after the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (Chan & Xia, 2009).



Figure 6. A Portrait of Xu Shichang by Miao Lizhen and Shao Hui

A conviction in the virtue of democracy grounded *Saturday Evening Post* illustrator Norman Rockwell (1894–1978), who humbly denied himself the title of artist. His more than 200 realistic posters typically portrayed the suburban lifestyle of middle-class White Americans prior to and after World War II, yet his strong belief in diversity and democracy became most pervasive in his later freelance work. A graphic depiction of the *Freedom of Speech* prompted a different interpretation in conventional times and inspired student teachers in my class.



Figure 7. A Portrait of Norman Rockwell by Katie

Revolutionary Foresight and Groundbreaking Endeavors

Advocacy for change is likely whimsical and short-lived when sustaining dynamics is difficult confronting greater forces affecting life and death. Certain dispositional traits necessitate a fighting spirit to push for change regardless of circumstances, and this grit also gave many wavemakers a discreet sense of direction and purpose in their own difficult lives—to face illness, addiction, and aging fearlessly.

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) is a well-known name, and the image of this artist dripping and splashing paint onto large canvases on the ground has become iconic. His transformation of bodily engagement into action painting reveals a philosophy borrowed from the Native American connection with earth energies. Pollock's forging ahead in the representation of pictorial space has definitely multiplied the possibilities of artists after him to surpass what's obvious and readily perceivable by the eyes to reach into the realm of abstraction, both in form and the inner human consciousness.

For preservice art teachers, the therapeutic involvement in the act of mimicking his style proved equally significant as the study of the literal meanings of his art. One of them stated:

Recently I was in New York City and saw some of his work up close, and this made me realize how much paint Pollock really used on each canvas. I wanted to create a

very layered drip and paint build up that could only be seen as the viewer came closer to the work. . . . I have used just black, white, and grays, which Pollock primarily used when he was at his worst—addicted to alcohol and very depressed. I can relate to this: I have experienced some hard times, and my paintings reflect depression most of the time.



Figure 8. A Portrait of Jackson Pollock by Sharon and Colleen

Adopting his name during a brief involvement with monkhood in his youth, Zhang Daqian (1899–1983) had reached a supreme height of cultivated sensibility in traditional Chinese painting style, but the accomplishment did not deter him from challenging this convention at age 60. He attempted to break ground in the classical depiction of the water lilies by splashing ink and wash to capture another glimpse of nature. To complement the nonfigurative representation and balance the conventional layout, he depicted hyperdetailed insects and buds surrounding the flowers to give each composition a unique aura. The subtleties were successfully articulated by a student who reflected:

I deeply appreciated the charm of the craft in the process of tracing the artist's style: Vigorous, smooth, accurate colors and concise with strong artistic appeal. The spiritual core is "pen and ink" while external subject categories of flowers, birds,

figures, and landscape are expressions of [abstract] concepts and ideas artistically. There is a kind of philosophy thinking developing from art that is *the essence* of art.



Figure 9. A Portrait of Zhang Daqian by Zhao Xuehong, Zhang Chi, and Teng Ge

Inter- and Transdisciplinary

Modernization was a central theme of many artists' work in the past 100 years as they struggled to discover exactly what it meant in their identity and in their arts. One characteristic is no doubt the core of professionalism (i.e., specialization). The profiles of many wavemakers indicate that they had to toil in isolation for years until they became outstanding on their own terms, yet the nature of certain disciplines, such as theatre production and filmmaking, necessitates collaboration among multiple creators and a group of professionals to cocapture the immediacy and hence transformed cinematography to landmark status in the 20th century.

By contrast the crossing, pushing, and erasing of boundaries in the works of many wavemakers were obvious as they struggled to conserve conventions yet desired to integrate further with other disciplines to accomplish their visionary statement.

When's the Next Tidal Wave?

Gravitating toward uniqueness is typical in new artistic creation and cultural expression; doing so may incidentally overemphasize contradictory outcomes stemming from differences instead of allowing a liberal platform to accommodate and embrace diversity. Sharing similarities can create an opportunity to bond and open up a space for interconnectedness, the ultimate goal of global education. In this project, participating students, faculty members, and administrators from both universities attended a prearranged videoconference featuring research on several wave-makers. All PowerPoint slides were sent as attachments via email to all the participants in the project prior to the videoconference so that everyone had the opportunity to preview the contents. As novel educational technology, the face-to-face feature of videoconferencing has considerable potential to bridge vast distances between educational settings for all levels (Cole, Ray, & Zanetis 2004; O'Brien & Alfano, 2009).

Successful cultural exchange in this synchronized virtual space requires detailed planning and the use of a substantial number of pedagogical strategies (Kan, 2011), but a heightened sense of critical reflection among its participants is also necessary. One student shared the following with me:

I realized there are constraints when sharing information internationally, . . . and I realize that subjecting students [of another country] to artists or artworks that may go against the country's idea of nationalism [or standard of censorship] could pose quite a risk for the students we were conferencing with.

To promote varied ways of perceiving history, the next step is a timeline reconstruction to merge coexisting art worlds. Timeline software (similar to Google® timeline) is currently in development at my university to celebrate its centennial anniversary; it allows easy comparison and contrast of events and individual endeavors in the past 100 years. Further goals of this global art project involve open invitations to as many partners across international borders as possible to participate in cocreating this new timeline for the arts.

In conclusion, this global education project provided an opportunity for participating students in both universities to (a) establish closer ties with learners in a globalized educational milieu that has shrunk because of the advancement of distance interactive technology in our time, (b) connect more intimately with peers from another culture through the life stories of extraordinary individuals in both communities, and (c) collaborate in forming a new learning community with a shared commitment and sooner or later, develop a common sense of urgency to coconstruct a merged timeline for the future.



Figure 10. Wave-Makers Exhibition

What Ebb and Flow to Watch

Several issues emerging from this global education curriculum have further implications in the field of arts education. Adopting a specific theme to study art, such as in this joint

venture, no doubt allows preservice art teachers to acquire the 21st-century life skills necessary to participate in a global community, including intercultural competence, communication, and negotiation skills. However, the fragmentation of historical study and the emphasis on positive impact permitted the students to engage in only an examination of the wave-makers' profiles and careers that was less than critical. Deconstruction of the social impact of the wavemaker's work was missing, and the lack of sophisticated critical thought by the students resulted in the romanticizing of the wave-makers.

Next, numerous wave-makers were left unmentioned during the brainstorming sessions and did not seem even to have a place in the common background of my preservice art teachers despite my careful intervention. I thus wondered what should constitute the basis of cultural literacy in the global village and what ought to be included in the scope of coverage necessary for the citizens of tomorrow: How do educators maintain a balance between informed curriculum decisions leading to the expansion of the boundaries of cultural literacy and minimize arbitrary representations?

In addition, as a college course instructor in art education, I was reluctant to support the inclusion of entertainment industry celebrities while privately indulging in their "art" for relaxation and pleasure, many of whom appeared in *55 Stars, Heroes and Icons America Loved* (Editors, 2010). The dilemma initially appears to be how to avoid silencing those behind the screen when students focus on those in the limelight. Further probing uncovered an inherent problem—diluting the contributions of those who had invested authentic effort, unfortunately without glamorous media coverage.

Where to Drop Anchor

This short conclusion sketches the potential of such curriculum in K12 settings. Practicing authentic multiculturalism in K12 classrooms becomes problematic because of the extra attention to outsider versus insider perspectives (Adejumo, 2002). Art teachers can anticipate a daunting task as they confront a complex world with numerous timelines of multiple coexisting cultures and the pressure to cover them all. Quality instruction time may be compromised to show fairness of coverage as equal attention sometimes means a wider breadth of coverage, resulting in the sacrificial loss of depth in most cases (Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia, & Rodrigue, 2006).

This curriculum approach empowers preservice art teachers by inviting their active participation in resisting hegemonic knowledge construction. They learned how to arrive at a persuasive conclusion about the past by mapping out messy information to locate evidence and satisfy their curiosity. The grand narrative of art history with which they are familiar is often based on canonical aesthetics and centered on institutional art as curriculum foundation

and instructional foci. Furthermore, the linear representation of time framed by positivism often creates the impression of historical events as status quo, where creative interpretations and discoveries are rejected. As a result of long exposure to this overarching paradigm, they may have forgotten that history has a noble goal of expanding and enriching the mind with stories of people from all walks of life—from peasants to aristocrats regardless of Eastern or Western designation and from the entirety of human civilization.

This kind of exercise will equally benefit students in K12 setting as they scrutinize the profiles of those who made waves and uncover ramifications of what had happened to construct plausible explanations on their own. Through the redress of historically and culturally designated role models, learners of all ages can further affirm their personal contribution in making history meaningful and rejoice in their personal power to inject vitality into history, the humanities, and the arts.

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Koon is an associate professor in the School of Art at Kent State University. Her research interests include intercultural–international art collaborations, teacher education, and qualitative methodologies, especially visual narrative.